

Dr. Rose and Members of the CPS Board of Education,

The members of the board of the North Central Columbia Neighborhood Association wish to thank you for your service, and particularly for the work performed by the school redistricting committee. We understand the difficult nature of that committee's work and the intransigence of the goals they set. It is, therefore, difficult to criticize that work, but we believe if we do not voice our concerns we will not have done *our* work.

Therefore, the members of the North Central Columbia Neighborhood Association Board of Directors signing below would like to express profound disappointment in Approach B as the solution to school redistricting. While we heartily approve the goal of equity in public school education, we believe the recommended plan will produce negative consequences that out-weigh benefits gained by the expected equality in student demographic distribution, particularly at the intermediate and secondary school level. These negative consequences will be seen in student health, before- and after-school extra-curricular participation, parental engagement and community support, and drop-out and college entrance rates. Furthermore, we believe that the means for achieving educational equality on which Approach B is based is flawed, and that it will not result in the expected educational outcomes.

Four schools, Hickman High, Douglas High, Jefferson Junior and the former Field Elementary are within the NCCNA's boundaries. Many students from within the neighborhoods adjacent to these schools have historically walked to school. Should the boundaries for the upper level schools change as proposed, students from these neighborhoods will be bussed, sometimes a considerable distance. Busing large numbers of students will decrease the exercise they receive, and increase the stress they experience. These negative impacts will have life-long health consequences for the students and for society. Given the rampant and well documented incidence of obesity among school-age children, any opportunity for exercise should be encouraged. Approach B thwarts efforts to improve student health and is a bus ride down the wrong street.

Busing will have another negative consequence: a decline in extracurricular participation. Many students currently engage in before- and after- school activities because they can walk to and from events. It is well known that participation in extracurricular activities improves grades, in-school behavior and graduation rates. Moreover, students who participate in sports, clubs, band, drama, and the like are more inclined to enter (and succeed) in post-secondary education. Redistricting according to Approach B will, by default, limit the number of students able to participate to those whose parents are able to drive them to events. This will negatively affect the academic performance of students who currently walk to events at schools in their neighborhoods, and it will put

more students at risk of leaving school prematurely (this at the very time CPS administrators have expressed dismay about a rising tide of dropouts). Approach B is an anchor to academic achievement when what is needed is a sail.

Declining student engagement, created by a well intentioned but misguided redistricting policy will, in turn, reduce parental participation. The more distant and more difficult it is to reach a school, the fewer will be the number of parents seen or heard within the school building, and the less consistent will be their involvement. Already miserly, this bulwark of student achievement will be decimated by the growing distance between home and school. Approach B is akin to waving from across a busy, four-lane highway; the distance needed for a handshake and a conversation is more inviting.

The goal of redistricting—to improve academic outcomes by equalizing demographic distribution within schools—is laudable. However, the method proposed to achieve this goal—the redistribution of children from disparate backgrounds among dispersed schools through busing—has not proven overwhelmingly effective, primarily because the real problem is the academic effect of unequal housing and income.

Counting the number of free and reduced lunches within a school and reshuffling the **school's** deck doesn't change the suit the **child** is dealt. Rather, such a practice will dismantle neighborhood schools and the social connections such schools have traditionally supported. Furthermore, it places the burden of solving adult problems (social and economic inequality) on the shoulders of school children.

Two recent surveys of research on busing and academic achievement suggest other, more effective means (one at the school level, the other more broadly social) to achieve the goal of improved academic performance:

“The results suggest that schools serving mostly lower-income students tend to be organized and operated differently than those serving more-affluent students, transcending other school-level differences such as public or private, large or small.” (Russell W. Rumberger & Gregory J Palardy, *Does Segregation Still Matter? The Impact of Student Composition on Academic Achievement in High School*, *The Teachers College Record*, 2005)

“An alternative supported by a range of prior investigations would emphasize a change in focus to housing policy. Over three decades ago, Kain and Persky (1969) suggested that: De facto school segregation is another widely recognized limitation of Negro opportunities resulting from housing market segregation.” (Eric A. Hanushek, John F. Kain, Steven G. Rivkin, *NEW EVIDENCE ABOUT BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION: THE*

COMPLEX EFFECTS OF SCHOOL RACIAL COMPOSITION ON ACHIEVEMENT, Working Paper 8741, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w8741>, NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH, 1050 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138, January 2002)

If not with this school reorganization, then, in the aftermath, CPS should look at alternative ways to organize and operate schools, and should begin to exert influence on the broader social conditions that create the pressure to bus children. In order to overcome “separate but (un)equal” CPS support of integrated neighborhoods, equal and affordable housing, livable wages and a host of other proven, primary influences on children’s academic success would have lasting benefits to local public education, not least of which would be reduced costs for transportation, remediation and the consequences of poor student health. Of course, the real beneficiaries of supporting neighborhoods and the families who live there will be the students.

We do not have much hope the Board will immediately support such broad changes in policy and planning. Therefore, we ask that you give due consideration to the following before voting to approve Approach B: let school boundaries be drawn, as much as is possible, through commercial districts rather than splitting residential neighborhoods; insist that the largest number of students within walking distance of a school be enrolled in that school or that, alternatively, transfers be liberally allowed to support walking to school.

However, if you do adopt the committee-recommended approach, then build a partnership with the city’s public transit system and develop widely available and easily accessible transit routes and stops: for what you spend on transportation you could buy the city’s bus system several times over.

We have the means to achieve equality of education and still support neighborhood schools and the families that surround them. Don’t spend millions on a transportation system that further destroys walk-able neighborhoods, student health and achievement, and family involvement in public education.

Sincerely,

Pat Fowler, President, NCCNA
Mat Harrison, Vice-president/Treasurer NCCNA
Jeannie Wyble, Member of the Board, NCCNA
Rose Whittington, Member of the Board, NCCNA
Linda Rootes, Member of the Board, NCCNA
Yngve Digernes, Member of the Board, NCCNA
Adam Saunders, Member of the Board, NCCNA
Dan Cullimore, Member of the Board, NCCNA